

Trendy play flops

Beyond Therapy and 'Dentity Crisis
Phoenix Theatre
September 13 to October 6

review by Gilbert Bouchard

While Phoenix Theatre's season opener, *Beyond Therapy* promised a scathing look at modern psychology and 80's relationships, all it delivered was the same old clichés dulled up in modern day trendiness.

Contortion upon contortion is piled up, but instead of giving the play any depth, it just invents a confused situation comedy. All the trendy obsessions are paraded by order of angst: fear of intimacy, homosexuality, shrewish mothers, premature ejaculation, lustful (or infantile) shrinks, and the woman scared of commitment. If playwright Christopher Durang had been as diligent in creating well rounded characters as he was in rounding all the left liberal bases, he'd have one hell of a play.

For example, we know as much about one of the principal characters, Bruce (Raymond Storey) five minutes into the play as we do when the play finishes. Bruce, like all the

other characters, is given an easily grasped stereotypical handle. In this case, Bruce is the goofball bisexual who bursts into tears at the slightest provocation. Unfortunately, that's all his character does: he stands there and whimpers. By the end of the play Bruce's hysterics weren't even getting polite chuckles from the audience.

While trying to satirize the 80's search for instant gratification, *Beyond Therapy* ends up as shallow as the subjects it tries to parody.

At times the script succeeds in poking the proper nerves, pricking the spine of an impatient and surface society. Bruce wants to marry Prudence (Marianne Copithorne) only minutes after meeting her, and Dr. Framingham, (Blair Haynes) screams to one of his patients: "I don't feel like dragging the words out of you this week! So godamnit talk!"

Perhaps Durang fell prey to the shallowness he was attacking or maybe he just got lazy. In any case, I got the feeling he just couldn't be bothered to give his play any more subtlety.

In the second act he has one of the characters read out the play's theme which is promptly repeated five minutes later by



The cast of 'Dentity Crisis and Beyond Therapy

Photo Tim Hellum

another character. It seems like he doesn't trust us enough to figure out his message without direct explanation.

The messages he does present, though, are valid. Durang does have the guts to take delicate subjects and treat them with amazing candour and insight, but I also got the

feeling that he chose these subjects to avoid criticism; he seems to work on the premise that if your play has enough liberal icons it becomes above attack because to attack it is to open yourself to charges of bigotry. Admitting that you weren't comfortable with Durang's handling of gay characters brings cries of homophobia while comments that you weren't at ease with some of the comments on sex and sexuality brings about accusations of puritanism and uptightness. Strip Durang of his liberal pretensions and you'll wind up with a bad Neil Simon play.

My total disgust with the script aside, the production was more than adequate. While I was disappointed with the play, Bob Baker did an excellent job of directing a very talented cast, though the play could have used some selective editing in the second act. The cast was funny and quick and worked well together. Special praise to Blair Haynes for his portrayal of the lustful therapist and to Ray Storey for bringing Bruce to life with no help from the script.

Dancing with a deadly obsession



Miranda Richardson

Dance With a Stranger
Astral Films
Varscona

review by Suzette C. Chan

It's not as if it was difficult to care for *Dance With a Stranger*. More bascially, it was difficult to care about this movie.

Dance With a Stranger is about obsession, a perennially fascinating subject for artists and creators from Christopher Marlowe to Sylvester Stallone. Director Mike Newell starts with the premise that since obsession is inherently irrational, justifying or trying to understand obsessive behaviour is futile. This leaves only the effects of obsession.

Newell decides to take an objective approach to the film. The camera roves

detachedly from character to character, scene to scene.

The feeling of impending doom depends on the audience's knowledge of the fate of the characters. Ruth Ellis was an insecure working class divorcee who sought attention from an abusive, purposeless race car driver named David Blakely. To end the destructive affair, she eventually killed him. In 1955, Ellis became the last woman in Britain to pay for her crime by hanging.

Miranda Richardson portrays Ellis as a petty woman whose personality depends largely on her feminine effects: her cluttered, vanity, the over-the-top mannerisms, her haute-camp dress style. Richardson plays her first screen role with an edge of sarcasm but does not moralize about Ellis's actions or motivations.

In fact, Newell chooses not to explore motivations. The supporting characters are depicted in similarly voyeuristic manner. As David Blakely, Everett confirms his reign as current British king of sulk-and-sigh acting. After playing a precious teenager in *Another Country*, Everett does little to expand his repertoire by playing the spoiled Blakely.

Ian Holm puts workman-like effort into his role of Desmond Cussen, Ellis's frustrated admirer who finances her 10-year-old son's education and takes greater interest in her well-being than she does.

Shelagh Delaney's script could easily lend itself to drippy sentimentality but director Newell resists the urge to take sides. The audience is left to make its own conclusions — which is what newspaper readers do each time they are presented with a sensational

story. Without passion, *Dance With a Stranger* is a stylish melodrama. The mid-fifties setting is claustrophobic, the costumes, make-up and scenery lend meticulous detail to the film's depressing atmosphere. As perfect as it is, it's all too kitsch for its own good.

Dance With a Stranger is like a sociology case study or a splashy human interest story with the human interest taken out. The conclusions are up to the viewer. The enjoyment is up to the technocrats.

sub theatre

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The Album Playlist is based on Airplay — a combination of programmer preference and listeners' requests. Tune in every Sunday at 12:00 for the Alternative Countdown — the favorite albums, EP's singles and tapes.

TOP 10 ALBUMS

1. Dave Holland Quintet — Seeds of Time (ECM/WEA)
2. Jerry Jerry and The Sons of Rhythm Orchestra — Road Gore: The Band That Drank Too Much (Og (Canada)
3. Colourbox — Colourbox (4ad, UK)
4. Skinny Puppy — Bites (Nettwerk (Canada)
5. The Colour Field — Virgins and Philistines (Chrysalis/MCA)
6. Squeeze — Cosi Fan Tutti Fruitti (A&M)
7. Nona Hendryx — The Heat (RCA)
8. The Nashville Bluegrass Band — My Native Home (Rouder (US)
9. The Grapes of Wrath — September Bowl of Green (Nettwerk (Canada)*
10. Bill Frisell — Rambler (ECM/WEA)

Singles, EP's & Tapes

1. The Nex'D — Surreal (Black Bear (Canada)
2. Wilfred N and the Grown Men — Closer To You (Zonick Records)
3. Idyl Tea — Awfully Nice Eyes (Tape)
4. Chris & Cosy — Sweet Surprise (Tape)
5. Fell — Primitive Pointers/Cathedral (Cherry Red/UK)
6. Condition — Night and Day (Tape)
7. Husker DU — Makes No Sense (SST Records)
8. West India Company — Ave Marie (London/Polygram)
9. UB40 — Little Baggarriddim (DEP/Virgin)
10. Jackie Washington and the Mystery Band? — Is You Or Is You Ain't (Roto-Noto Records)